

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 11706

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: UNESCO, PORG, AORG
SUBJECT: UNESCO: THE MASS MEDIA: WHERE WE STAND AND
SOME THOUGHTS FOR THE FUTURE

REF: (A) PARIS 10985 (NOTAL), (B) PARIS 3366 (NOTAL)

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: APRIL UNESCO COURIER ISSUE ON
COMMUNICATIONS PAVES WAY FOR LEGITIMACY AND
INSTITUTIONALIZATION ON INTERNATIONAL SCALE OF CONCEPTS
EMBODIED IN PHRASES SUCH AS "NEW INTERNATIONAL ORDER OF
INFORMATION," THE "DECOLONIALIZATION OF INFORMATION,"
THE "RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE," AND THE "FREE AND BALANCED
FLOW OF INFORMATION." ALTHOUGH AUTHORS OF FEATURE
ARTICLES, INCLUDING SECRETARIAT OFFICIALS AND THIRD
WORLD MEDIA SPECIALISTS, ESCHEW CONFRONTATION FOR CON-
STRUCTIVE DIALOGUE, MANDATE WHICH THEY UNDERSTAND TO
HAVE RECEIVED FROM UNESCO'S 19TH GENERAL CONFERENCE
WILL LEAD TO IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICT WITH "WESTERN" POINT
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OF VIEW OVER FUNDAMENTAL COMMUNICATION POLICY ISSUES.
WITH NEXT GENERAL CONFERENCE LESS THAN TWO YEARS
AWAY, WE SHOULD BEGIN TO CONSIDER OPTIONS AND STRATEGIES
NOW IN ORDER TO FORMULATE CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH TO MASS
MEDIA QUESTIONS, AND AVOID BEING SHOULDERED AGAIN
WITH UNCONSTRUCTIVE DEFENSE OF NEGATIVE POSITION.
END SUMMARY.

2. UNESCO'S APRIL COURIER MAGAZINE JUST RECENTLY RELEASED, IS DEVOTED TO MASS MEDIA ISSUE, AND PROVIDES FIRST PUBLISHED UNESCO VIEWS SINCE COMPREHENSIVE AIRING OF INFORMATION QUESTIONS AT 19TH GEN CONF IN NAIROBI. OF COURIER'S 8 FEATURE ARTICLES, ALL CAREFULLY EDITED AND TUNED, 3 ARE BY SECRETARIAT OFFICIALS, 3 BY "NON-ALIGNED" AUTHORS, 1 BY SOVIET GIVING USSR VIEW OF MASS MEDIA AND SOCIETY, AND 1 BY NATCOM'S WILLIAM HARLEY PRESENTING AMERICAN VIEWPOINT. SECRETARIAT OFFICIALS SAY THAT COURIER WILL BE DISTRIBUTED LIBERALLY AT APRIL 18-20 FLORENCE SYMPOSIUM ON "FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION."

3. THIS "BALANCED" COURIER ISSUE TRIES TO PUT UNESCO OFFICIALLY ON NEUTRAL OR "UN-ALIGNED" GROUND, BETWEEN EXTREME POSITIONS, AND THUS PRESUMABLY IN SITUATION TO MEDIATE AND DIRECT MASS MEDIA DISCUSSION AND PROGRAM DEBATE. (IN FACT, UNESCO SECRETARIAT DOES TEND TO PLAY OFF BOTH ENDS -- EAST AND WEST -- IN FAVOR OF THE THIRD WORLD MIDDLE, AS 19TH GENERAL CONFERENCE AMPLY DEMONSTRATED.) UNESCO POSITIONS ARE ALSO SHOWING UP IN WORKING DOCUMENTS PREPARED BY SECRETARIAT FOR FLORENCE SYMPOSIUM (REFTEL A). BOTH SETS ARE RESULT OF CONTINUING THOROUGH ANALYSIS OF 19TH GEN CONF DEBATE ON MASS MEDIA. THIS HAS BEEN FLESHED OUT AND TEMPERED WITH UNESCO COMMUNICATION DIVISION EXPERTS' VIEWS, AND BY ASTUTE COURIER OFFICIALS, WHO HAVE PRODUCED REASONABLE, CONFIDENTIAL

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MODERATE, AND CONCILIATORY ISSUE WHICH JUDICIOUSLY RAISES CONTENTIOUS ISSUES WITHOUT APPEARING TO TAKE SIDES. NONETHELESS, ATMOSPHERE PRODUCED BY ISSUE INDICATES UNESCO SECRETARIAT FEELS 19TH GEN CONF PROVIDED IT MANDATE NOT ONLY FOR SHEPARDING INFORMATION DEBATE, BUT ALSO FOR PLAYING MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN FUTURE. ADG FOR CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION, M. MAKAGIANSAR (INDONESIA) HAS POINTED OUT IN LEAD ARTICLE FOR EXAMPLE THAT QUOTE UNESCO INTENDS NO LONGER TO CONFINE ITSELF TO SPEAKING GENERALLY ABOUT "FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION" AND "FREEDOM OF INFORMATION," BUT ALSO TO TALK IN TERMS OF ACCESS TO AND PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNICATION, AND A "BALANCED FLOW OF INFORMATION." UNQUOTE

4. UNDERLYING THEME OF COURIER ISSUE IS THAT A "NEW DIALOGUE" HAS EMERGED FROM 19TH GEN CONF WHERE ALL OF UNESCO'S MEMBER STATES RECOGNIZED HARMFUL IMBALANCES IN INTERNATIONAL FLOW OF INFORMATION, AND PLEDGED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. GENERALLY, ARTICLES WELCOME

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ACCEPTANCE OF THIS FACT, OUTLINE ACTIVITIES OF UNESCO
AND SELECTED "NON-ALIGNED" GROUPS IN COMMUNICATIONS
FIELD TO DATE, AND STRESS NEED TO FORMULATE COMMUNI-
CATION POLICIES WHICH WILL RECTIFY "IMBALANCES" AND
LEAD TO REAL (TWO-WAY) COMMUNICATION AT NATIONAL AND
INTERNATIONAL LEVELS. THESE CONCEPTS ARE FRAMED IN
PHRASES LIKE "THE NEW WORLD ORDER OF INFORMATION,"
"DECOLONIALIZATION OF INFORMATION," "THE EVOLUTION"
OF CONCEPT OF "THE RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE," AND A "FREE
AND BALANCED FLOW OF INFORMATION."

5. ARTICLES GENERALLY RECOGNIZE, NONETHELESS,
ENORMITY AND COMPLEXITY OF ACHIEVING GOALS EMBODIED IN
THESE CONCEPTS, AND ABIDING DIFFICULTY OF DEALING WITH
WIDE GAPS BETWEEN OPPOSING IDEOLOGICAL VIEWS. ACCOR-
DINGLY, THIRD WORLD AND UNESCO MEDIA EXPERTS SEEM
TO ASCRIBE TO THEORY OF THE THIRD WORLD AND THE
INDUSTRIALIZED WORLD'S "EVOLVING UNDERSTANDING" OF
MASS MEDIA PROBLEMS IN ORDER TO EXPLAIN PROCESS BY
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WHICH INDUSTRIALIZED STATES HAVE COME TO CLEARER UNDERSTANDING OF MASS MEDIA ISSUES. WITHIN THIS RUBRIC OF (SUCCESSFUL) EVOLUTION, THIRD WORLD CONSENSUS IS FOR DIALOGUE AND COMPROMISE, NOT CONFRONTATION. TUNISIA'S RIDHA NAJAR, FOR EXAMPLE, AIMS REASSURING WORDS AT WESTERNERS, THAT QUOTE FAR FROM WISHING TO SUPPLANT OR SHORT-CIRCUIT THE TRANSNATIONAL NEWS AGENCIES -- EVEN IF THIS WERE POSSIBLE -- INTERCOMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES SHOULD SEEK TO FILL THE GAPS WHICH THOSE AGENCIES LEAVE (WHETHER INTENTIONALLY OR OTHERWISE), TO COMPENSATE FOR THEIR OMISSIONS AND ABOVE ALL TO PROVIDE MORE REGULAR INFORMATION GATHERED IN THE COUNTRIES WHICH IT CONCERNS. UNQUOTE.

6. WHILE ATTEMPT CLEARLY IS BEING MADE TO CONSIDER VESTED INTERESTS AND RANGE OF VIEWS BETWEEN FULLY CONTROLLED AND LAISSEZ-FAIRE MEDIA STRUCTURES, FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE, FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS REMAIN. COURIER ARTICLES AND FLORENCE SYMPOSIUM WORKING PAPERS INDICATE THAT UNESCO SECRETARIAT, AS WELL AS THIRD WORLD MEMBERS AND "BLOC" STATES, GENERALLY FEEL THAT SINCE ALL UNESCO MEMBERS NOW AGREE TO EXISTENCE OF CERTAIN PROBLEMS IN MASS MEDIA FIELD (REFLECTING ON RESULTS OF MASS MEDIA DEBATE AT 19TH GEN CONF), IT IS TIME TO FORMULATE AN "INTERNATIONAL CODE OF ETHICS IN THE FIELD OF INFORMATION." TAKEN AS A FORMAT FOR ACTION, THIS DEDUCING FROM NORMATIVE PRECEPTS OR "FIRST PRINCIPLES", REGARDLESS OF HOW WELL INTENTIONED, IMPRACTICAL, OR UNOBTAINABLE THEY MAY BE, COULD STIMULATE NEW LIFE AND VIGOR FOR PRODUCING A MORE SUBSTANTIAL "DECLARATION ON THE USES OF THE MASS MEDIA" THAN WE HAVE HOPED MIGHT BE THE CASE (REFTEL B, PARA 2). THIS NORMATIVE POINT OF DEPARTURE WOULD ALSO RUN HEADLONG INTO WESTERN "ANGLO-SAXON" PRECEPTS WHICH CONSTITUTE BASIS FOR WESTERN POSITION THAT COMMUNICATIONS POLICIES OR CODES (IF ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY) BE CONSTRUCTED ON THE BASIS OF

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"PRECEDENCE" AND WHAT SEEMS TO "WORK" IN SOLVING "SPECIFIC" PROBLEMS. IN OTHER WORDS, TO AVOID TAUTOLOGIES WHICH CONFUSE ISSUES AND MAKE SOLUTIONS MUCH MORE DIFFICULT. UNFORTUNATE REALITY IS THAT LARGE MAJORITY OF UNESCO'S MEMBER STATES SHARE "NORMATIVE" IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK INTO WHICH THEY FIT THE WORLD.

7. ANOTHER THEME SEEMINGLY MORE SHARPLY ARTICULATED THAN HAS BEEN EVIDENT BEFORE IN UNESCO CONTEXT,

IS THAT "COMMERCIALIZATION" OF INFORMATION IS HARMFUL TO SOCIETY, AND UNACCEPTABLE. "INFORMATION," NAJAR SAYS, "AS FAR AS THIRD WORLD IS CONCERNED, SHOULD NO LONGER BE TREATED AS COMMODITY, BUT INSTEAD BE A 'SERVICE' PUT AT DISPOSAL OF MANKIND." WHILE WE MAY WISH TO DISMISS THIS ASSERTION FOR ITS NARROWNESS, IDEA IS ALSO DEVELOPED BY SECRETARIAT OFFICIAL (NORWAY) IN CONCRETE TERMS OF SALES OF COMMUNICATION HARDWARE, AND INFORMATION WHICH ARE UNRELATED TO AND EVEN DISRUPTIVE OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS IN THIRD WORLD.

8. THE FACTS OF CASES LIKE THIS ONE ARE DIFFICULT TO DISPUTE, AND THEREFORE, ALSO THE IDEOLOGICAL COMMITMENT THAT ONE WAY TO HELP RECTIFY SITUATION, OR AT LEAST TO MAKE IT UNDERSTANDABLE, IS BY A "NORMATIVE" DECLARATION (FROM ABOVE) AND SPECIFIC ASSOCIATED CODES OF BEHAVIOR. IT SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISING, THEREFORE, THE LACK OF SYMPATHY, NOT TO MENTION UNDERSTANDING, FOR OUR

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POSITION THAT EVEN "A LITTLE" FORMAL CONTROL OVER INFORMATION COLLECTION AND CONTENT OPENS DOOR TO HUMAN FRAILTY AND THEREFORE INCALCULABLE ABUSE.

9. IDEOLOGICALLY CONSISTENT WESTERN

WOULD NEED TO RESTATE FUNDAMENTAL PREMISE THAT A PARTICULAR ISSUE OR QUESTION SHOULD BE FRAMED IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT CAN BE PROVED OR DISPROVED ON BASIS OF EXPERIENCE, AND ARGUE THAT RECASTING SOLUTION IN TERMS OF TAUTOLOGIES (DECLARATIONS, ETHICAL CODES, ETC.) WILL ONLY MUDDY THE WATERS MAKING REAL SOLUTIONS MORE DIFFICULT.

10. DIFFICULTIES GENERATING SUPPORT FOR THIS POSITION IN INTERNATIONAL BODY OF 142 MEMBER STATES, MANY OF WHOM ARE JUST AS CONVINCED OF INVIOABILITY OF "NORMATIVE" POINT OF DEPARTURE, ARE OBVIOUS. YET, ALTERNATIVE IS EITHER COMPROMISE BY NEGOTIATING BEST "NORMATIVE" LANGUAGE WE CAN GET, OR BY LOOSING OUTRIGHT.
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11. IN VIEW OF THESE CHOICES, ONE APPROACH ALREADY HINTED AT BY US DEL IN NAIROBI, MIGHT BE FIRM US MATERIAL SUPPORT, TO THIRD WORLD STATES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR OWN CAPACITY FOR "SELF EXPRESSION" IN INTERNATIONAL THEATRE. WHILE THIS MIGHT ALSO HAVE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF PURGING FRUSTRATIONS, UNDERLYING IDEA WOULD BE TO ASSIST THIRD WORLD STATES TO BE COMMERCIALY COMPETITIVE IN FIELDS OF INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL INFORMATION EXCHANGE. OVER TIME THIS WOULD SERVE TO ACQUAINT SOME WITH "WESTERN" PRECEPTS OF PROBLEM SOLVING IN INFORMATION FIELD PER PARA 8, AND PERHAPS WEAKEN DEMAND FOR INTERNATIONAL CODES OF CONDUCT, CENSORSHIP, OR OTHER RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION.

12. AT SAME TIME (AS ONGOING US POLICY DEMONSTRATES) WE COULD LIVE WITH IDEA OF NORMATIVE CODES FOR NATIONAL COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES, AND TRY TO DEVELOP RATIONALE FOR CHANNELING "NEED" AND DESIRE FOR "NORMATIVE" STATEMENTS IN THAT DIRECTION. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT, IF A SHOWDOWN CAN BE AVOIDED ON PROMULGATION OF AN "INTERNATIONAL DECLARATION ON USES OF MASS MEDIA," DIFFICULTIES WHICH ARE SURFACING AT REGIONAL LEVELS IN FORMULATING MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE CODES MAY RESULT IN UNDERSTANDING FOR POSITION OF HAVING NONE AT ALL IN "INTERNATIONAL" REALM. SUCCESS, OF COURSE, WILL ALSO DEPEND ON PROGRESS IN OTHER POLITICAL PROBLEM AREAS.

13. WHILE ENCOURAGING AND SUPPORTING REGIONAL MEDIA ACTIVITIES, WHICH COULD ALSO BE VIEWED AS "SHAKEDOWN" CRUISE FOR SOME KINDS OF MEDIA PROGRAMS WITH INTERNATIONAL SCOPE, DIFFERING IDEOLOGICAL APPROACHES

WITHIN THIRD WORLD "RANKS" TO FORMULATION OF COMMUNICATION POLICIES, SHOULD ALSO BE CAREFULLY ASSESSED. SUCH A FUSS IN THE WESTERN PRESS WAS RAISED CONCERNING JULY 1976 INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE IN COSTA RICA, CONFIDENTIAL

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FOR EXAMPLE, THAT A VICIOUS STRUGGLE BETWEEN CARIBBEAN, ENGLISH SPEAKING STATES, AND THEIR LATIN AMERICAN NEIGHBORS, OVER CONTENT AND ORIENTATION OF WORKING DOCUMENTS, AND EVEN TERMS OF PARTICIPATION, SEEMS GENERALLY TO HAVE GONE UNNOTICED. FURTHER EXAMINATION OF THIS CONFLICT WILL BE NECESSARY BEFORE COMING TO ANY CONCLUSIONS ABOUT SUBSTANCE OF DISPUTE. POINT IS, HOWEVER, THAT BY CAREFUL STUDY OF SCHISMS ALREADY APPARENT WITHIN THE "RANKS," WE MAY DISCOVER MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR REALIZING SUPPORT FOR "WESTERN" POSITIONS AND APPROACHES, THAN NOW WOULD SEEM POSSIBLE.

HARLAN

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